

## June 2013: Special Topics Call – Vicki Amorose

Alyson: Hello, everyone. Welcome to our June 2013 special topic call for Silver members of the Art Biz Incubator. Our guest today is Vicki Amorose. Hi, Vicki.

Vicki: Hi, Alyson. Hello, everyone.

Alyson: Let me just say a few words about Vicki. She is an artist, writer and voice-over talent. Her work as an educational media writer, advertising copywriter, art instructor, museum docent and gallery manager gave her the background to write her recently released book, Art-Write: The Writing Guide for Visual Artists.

I'm really glad that you wrote this, Vicki, so I don't have to because I really do have a file folder on my computer for this book, but I don't need to write it down.

Vicki: Thank you so much for inviting me, Alyson. It's really a treat to be able to talk about art and writing to people who need it and also know something about it. This is great.

Alyson: Everyone listening to this conversation should be well-versed on writing. I've written and talked about it enough. It's in my book a lot. I consistently tout the value of writing about one's art and writing in general. You kind of are preaching to the choir. They might not be the converted yet, but they are not uninitiated. They know they need to be doing this. We know too that they always look forward to other viewpoints.

You know because of what you and I have been talking or emailing about that we're pretty casual on our calls, but I thought we might start with the preface of your book. That is about your art history instructor in college. Tell us about him and why you use him as a starting point.

Vicki: It was interesting. I was writing this book and was pretty far into it when I realized that the point I was trying to get across to visual artists actually came from something I learned from Rudolf Arnheim, which was in my artistry days at the University of Michigan.

If you're at all interested, Dr. Rudolf Arnheim is an incredible person to learn about. You can look him up on Wikipedia. He died at the age of 102 and was a pioneer of the psychology of art. His most well-known textbook is Art and Visual Perception, which people say is one of the most influential books on art and perception written in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

He was an amazing person. Even though his textbooks are very dense, and dense with theory, he was the most joyous professor I ever had. He was just so in love with what he did and who he was teaching.

I wrote in my preface what I call the Arnheim insight. These are not his only insights by a long shot, but for this subject and what I wanted to get across, I will read how I distilled it down.

Insight 1 is that the act of seeing or looking is not a simple process.

Insight 2 is that seeing takes time to accomplish.

Insight 3 is that just as an artist toils with his or her own powers of perception and sense of vision to create a work of art, the viewer toils with his or her own powers of perception and hence the vision to see a work of art.

Insight 4, and this is the big one, is that a language shapes perception.

Language shapes perception is the concept that really intrigues me and has stuck with me for decades. I'm very fascinated by that.

What I'm saying in Art-Write is that when you consider these ideas from Arnheim, you begin to understand that how your audience approaches your work truly seeing what's in front of them is an accomplishment. It doesn't happen quickly. They need time to see it, and they might need a little education. That's where your writing comes in.

That's the fundamental premise of my book, Alyson. It's there in the preface.

Alyson: It's exactly what I teach. That's why I wanted you to start with that because you just validated everything I say.

Vicki: Good.

Alyson: Mine was based on working as a museum curator and educator because I just know that language shapes perception and that your first act of looking or seeing is not a simple process. We don't teach people how to look at art.

Unless you take an art history class, you don't automatically know how to look at lines, shapes, colors, textures and symbolism. You really need to have the words to show people and to walk people through your art to connect them with it.

Vicki: I agree completely. Sometimes it's the simplest thing you can say that leads the person into a work of art. When I was a docent at an Asian art museum people

would be staring at a wall-size Korean mural. They'd never seen any Korean art before in their lives.

You could say, "The crane is a symbol of longevity." Suddenly people could enter the picture. They'd think, "Yes, there's a crane up there and down there." It was just that little sense that put them in touch with what they were seeing. It kind of organized the visual chaos for them. They could begin to see it.

Alyson: Right. There are things that are simple to us because we live with them, think about them and make art from them. They seem like duh moments, but most people don't have that. They don't have that language. What's simple to you is not simple to everyone.

Vicki: This is true, but I think where artists can get off track is the idea that their language needs to be complex in order to reflect the complexity of their work. I just think the simpler the better because that's the way to lead them in. The rest is up to them.

Alyson: I'm glad that you said that because simple language is not easy to write.

Vicki: Thank you. I agree.

Alyson: It is a process of stripping away things. I know this because I just know how convoluted some of my writing has been in the past. It's such a process to get down to the essence of what you're trying to say.

Vicki: The simplest things clearly can sometimes take the most work.

Alyson: Yes. We want it to be simple, but it's not simple to do. We're not going to pull the wool over anyone's eyes here.

Vicki: No. I like to say a small amount of writing takes a great deal of thinking, but it can be done. It's not something insurmountable.

Alyson: I can actually tell how much thought someone has put into their writing by how simple it is or easy it is to understand. If I can't understand it, then I know they didn't work hard enough.

Vicki: That's very well said. You so appreciate it when it is clear.

Alyson: I know that for everyone listening it feels the same way and that they've read a lot of art speak, art-ese and a lot of things where they think, "What the heck is that person even trying to say," or it's a bad artist statement. We've all been there. We know how to appreciate the simple and get to the point kinds of things.

We're talking about speaking and writing simultaneously. They go hand in hand in some sense.

Vicki: I think in the sense that it's much easier for a lot of artists to speak about their work than to write about it. Yes, they go hand in hand.

I recently put up a video on my blog from an artist from the Venice Biennale. He was being interviewed by a big gallery in New York. He spoke very articulately about his work, the how, the what and the why. They're right there.

Then I said, "Now remember that this is edited." It was given that touch in the end where it is arranged artificially. That director and that editor put the why in the front. Then they added the how and the what.

It was an interesting thing to see how well he spoke, yet it still took that effort to intellectually structure it so that it was brought to the audience in a cohesive way that could be easy to understand.

I think you and I both have talked about how important it is to speak up about who you are as an artist and have something ready to say. That does go hand in hand.

I, of course, recommend an informal interview with your friends or someone who likes your art that can bring out wonderful and clear sentences that you wouldn't have arrived at if you were just sitting with a computer or a pen.

Alyson: That's right. The person that gets to the Venice Biennale has probably been interviewed hundreds of times before that point. We have to take that into account also. He's probably had to write answers to things so that he's writing about it. Then he talks it and reads what he wrote.

Vicki: He repeats it.

Alyson: Exactly. It's a process and doesn't just flow off the tongue effortlessly the first time for anyone. It's just really a process of talking about your art, like you said in interviewing. It could be a formal or an informal situation, but it's just the process of talking about your art. Talking about art in general gives you language to use.

Vicki: Yes, absolutely.

Alyson: It's so important. I'm throwing you a curve ball here because poor Vicki waited on an outline from me. Then most of you listening know I was dealing with my cat's passing last week. It just threw everything off. Vicki was gracious enough to kind of wing it with me. I gave her a little bit of an outline.

Vicki: I'm a good winger.

Alyson: What I was going to say is maybe we could brainstorm for people listening some of those situations where people can talk about their art. There are the formal critique groups that people have. Then there's the interview. You can set up an interview. We just talked about this.

I did a teleseminar last night with Gigi Rosenberg about the artist's talk. We talked about just getting together people in your living room or your friend's living room to talk about your art but then there's gallery visiting with a friend.

Vicki: Yes, absolutely. I think those casual conversations with friends really can bring out some wonderful sentences. The question from the other person is key to not just repeating your cache of wisdom. Do you know what I'm saying? We have things that we repeat.

Repetition is a good way to test if it still rings true because your views about yourself and your art change. You might have had a sentence in your pocket that's five years old. You have to ask yourself, "Does that still ring true?" If it does, keep using it, but it's those questions that might come from a friend that you've never really considered before.

This is true of all conversations, not just conversations about your art where the answer comes out of you and you hear yourself for the first time say it. That's often how I find things and think, "I have to write that down."

Alyson: It's true. I was writing an essay for a catalogue on an artist. I won't mention him by name. I should out him but I'm not going to. There was all this convoluted symbolism in his work. He would tell me about some of it. I'd say, "What about this?" He says, "Yes. That's probably in there."

Everything I would say he would say, "Sure." It was like he was totally open to it, but after a while I begin to think he was full of BS. I think that he did learn a little bit from what I was getting at.

I think that when you start talking to people, people say the damndest things, especially if they don't know anything about art. Those are people you want to love. You show them that they're in a safe environment and you're open to their ideas. They will say stuff where you'll say, "Wow, I didn't even see that," and "Of course. That's exactly what I was thinking."

Vicki: "I never thought about that before."

Alyson: If you're open to that, it's really cool.

Vicki: I agree. Alyson, you had complimented the prompts that I wrote in my book. I think there are lists of things to think about.

That could be a tool to have your friend pop these questions and see what comes out of your mouth for an informal interview. There are the questions for your friend and they can throw in spontaneous things also. It just might prompt that beautiful sentence that really means something to you and the listener. Like I said, it can be so simple.

Alyson: The prompts that Vicki is talking about are scattered throughout the book, which is nice. I really like it. We've used them in this program before and its earlier iteration, which was *The Artist Conspiracy*. We did prompts one month and they were really popular. It's been a couple of years, I think, since we did that.

You can take these or you could even write your own prompts, and before you even write about or think too deeply about them, give them to someone else to interview you. I like that.

Vicki: If that's the way you work best to have a question surprise you a little, there's value in that. There's value in both ways of approaching it, either thinking about it long and hard while you're working for weeks and then having someone you know surprise you with this question and see what comes out of your mouth.

Alyson: I like both of them. The preparation is always good, but it would also be fun to see what happens when it comes from the gut. Then later you can work on it. Do a combination of some prompts and some study. I think it's never a bad idea to be prepared.

Vicki: That's true.

Alyson: What are some of your favorite prompts? Do you have two or three of them that maybe people listening could write down and riff off of them for a while?

Vicki: Let me think of one. This sounds complicated, but I like the ideas it prompts. This is in the how section. I divided them into questions that begin with how, what and why. In how, it was how would you describe the contrast or continuity in your work?

Alyson: You can take that in all different directions too. It could be the latest body of work or the work over the years.

Vicki: Pick the one you're working on right now. That would be up to you to what you want to apply it to.

I think I like that question because most artists can grab on to either the word “contrast” or “continuity,” or both. It makes you think, “Where is that in my work? Where’s the continuity?”

That’s interesting for a viewer to perceive also. They can say, “I can see how this thread runs through all the work or pulls together this one work. Now I get it. I can see it better.” That’s why that one is good for me. Did you have a favorite one?

Alyson: Again, the prompt is how would you describe the contrast or continuity in the work? I was just going to say with that one that you could use that with any type of work. I can use that in my business and think about it. When you were saying that, I thought, “I should think about that.” I can, anyway.

Vicki: Good. I like those questions that are broad enough to draw everyone in, yet the answers are all going to be unique.

Alyson: What about one of the whats? That was a how. I like this one. What are you investigating? The reason I like that is it makes me think of an artist whose talk I went to last fall. I’m not going to remember her name. She did these wacky paintings. I’ll have to share her name in the follow-up information with this call.

Throughout the artist talk she would say, “I was thinking about how you would eat your own face and how I would paint that.” You think, “Whoa, what made you think of that?”

Every painting that she did was the result of a problem she set up for herself. How do you depict this or that?

I like that question because I think artists should be curious. It doesn’t have to be how do you eat your own face, but it could be curiosity about a color, subject or anything.

Vicki: What are you investigating? It also frees up this idea that you have to have the answers. You’re in the process of investigating it.

I know a lot of artists who say, “I’m asking questions. I don’t know anything more than anyone else does. I can’t tell them what to see or what my conclusion is about this.” Great. Talk about what you’re investigating and don’t provide answers. Just say what was curious to you.

Alyson: I think that’s the best art, that which poses a question. The best art doesn’t wrap things up neatly in a nice package with a bow on it. It’s way more complicated than that.

Vicki: Art is not stable that way. I think David Bowie said that. There's not one authoritative voice about any piece of art. It's all important. I like that concept too.

I almost talked about this, and I didn't write about it in the book because I left it open, but have you ever seen a question in an artist statement? What do you think of it? Suppose there's a question.

Alyson: If it were me working with that artist on the statement, I would take the question out.

Vicki: I agree.

Alyson: Good. I think the statement should be a statement and not further confuse people. Most people don't have the knowledge or confidence to answer that question. I usually don't like questions in statements.

Vicki: This is how I feel about it but I wanted to ask your opinion. An artist recently handed me a so-called artist statement and all it was, was a series of questions. The artist had asked seven questions in a row. The artist said to me, "Isn't this great?" I said, "It's called an artist statement for a reason. It's not an artist question."

To me it felt like a copout. It was being lazy about helping your viewers see and helping your reader enter the work in front of them. That's the work that is needed when an artist writes about their work. You're helping someone, not putting them off.

A question, now that I think about it, has the same effect as art speak and gibberish. It pushes people away instead of drawing them in.

Alyson: I don't think the statement is a place for questions. Because you are a docent, you know this. Docents are trained to use open-ended questions.

That's a really good place for a question, when you're standing in front of the art and asking people if they've ever been to a place like this. It's something that doesn't require a right or wrong answer.

There's real value in that because it brings people in and shows them that their opinions are valid regardless of what they are.

In the statement, people are looking for guidance. Almost any question can be turned into a statement. "How does one eat their face?" would be "I was thinking about how one eats their own face." I am so sorry I keep bringing up that one example.

Posing a lot of questions makes you look like you don't have any answers and you don't know what you're doing.

Vicki: You could title a piece with a question if you just had to get that question mark in there. That's perfectly great.

Alyson: Questions are great for blog post titles.

Vicki: We are looking for a statement.

Alyson: Absolutely. What about a why? You had the what, how and why.

Vicki: The why I separated a bit from the how and what because this is the one that takes the most thinking and is the deepest reflection.

I wanted to get the point across that it's what art lovers want to know. As an art lover, I want to know why, just a little taste of it. You don't have to write a thesis about it. That is so interesting to me, to get a little taste of the why and try to articulate the ideas behind the work.

Also, artists have the most resistance come up when they're posed with "why did you do this?" They say, "I can't explain. I don't explain. That's why it's visual. It's not verbal." That's where you get the real stubbornness to come out. To me, that means there's something valuable there, that initial resistance.

The one prompt is "why did you make this?" but you can break that down into its belief, idea and emotion. That's how I see it. The prompts would be what do you believe in? What belief are you investigating? What emotion was primary while you made this artwork and how does that emotion come through? What were you thinking about during the process? What inspired the direction? That's how I break down the why.

I just want to emphasize how that is a little golden nugget to me as an art lover. It brings me closer to the artist and the work I'm looking at.

Alyson: When I worked in museum education, this is what we were told by the master museum educators. Men were interested in the how and women were interested in the why.

Vicki: That's interesting to hear.

Alyson: Men were interested in how things were made and how much they cost. Women were interested in why and the emotion part of it. If you have one of those as your niche audience, you want to appeal to that. It helps you to cover both of those bases.

Vicki: Yes, I think so. When you say women and the why and emotion, what about idea, conviction and belief?

Alyson: I think those are all tied up in the emotion. Don't you?

Vicki: I don't know. I think I tend to separate them. This might be semantics but I tend to separate an intellectual idea from an emotion. On the other hand, you'd have to be emotionally tied to an idea in order to want to do art about it most of the time. I'm getting off track here.

Alyson: It's all very interesting. We could talk about this forever. Talk about talking about art. It's so stimulating. I hope that people on the line think it is too.

To think about these things that you don't usually allow yourself to think about, there are real reasons you go deep with your writing and speaking. You're just doing them and making art.

I don't know if Janice McDonald is on the phone, but I'm going to out her. She's one. She's one of our members. She does collages but doesn't use scissors. She only tears. I've told her over and over again that I think this is so different from how most people do collages. That's just fascinating. I'm always standing behind her saying, "She doesn't use scissors."

Plus you can see the tear marks. She just does it and doesn't really think about it. It's just how she does it. To me, I think it's fascinating. I'm really exploring that.

Vicki: You need to title her show "She Doesn't Use Scissors."

Alyson: She's been pretty good at that. I'm a huge fan of hers. I hope her face isn't turning red or that she isn't hating me right now.

Vicki: Art, to me and you, is endlessly interesting. That's what makes it such a rich soil to connect with words from. Words are going to help bring more people into that area of being interested and fascinated by it. It's something that draws us all together. It makes art a collective effort to say, feel and share something. I love that part.

It brings to mind when I first had the idea for a book. I have a million ideas and some of them get done and some don't. I had a talk with this well-respected artist from Eugene where I live. We went out to coffee. He liked the idea for my book.

Then he said, "Why are you doing this? Why are you writing about this? It's not like you're going to make a bunch of money or anything."

My answer was because it interests me and has interested me for three decades. I find the intersection of language and image a fascinating topic. This is what I want to do. I'm doing it because it interests me.

Alyson: There's another reason that you did it too. You may not know this, but it's going to help a lot of people.

Vicki: I hope so. I really do. I did have that intention because it's needed. More artists need to sustain their art making. The world needs more art. This is what's required in our media environment. It's words. Thank you for saying that, Alyson.

Alyson: You have the how, what and why. You suggest starting with those as a place for your statement, yes?

Vicki: Yes.

Alyson: Here's what I think artists have had a really hard time with. It's using all these prompts, coming up with it and then saying, "Now what do I do with all the stuff that I've written? It can't all go into a statement."

I really want to encourage that because remember we were talking about that things have to get complicated before they can get simple. You need to have a lot of words before you can pick out the really good ones and the best ideas.

Would you say that some people's statements are going to be focused more on one or the other, like the what or the how, or would you encourage them to put all of the how, what and why in the statement?

Vicki: I think the most comprehensive statements do contain just a sentence or two about each how, what and why. However, when people as individuals run into difficulties explaining the how, what or why, focus on what comes more easily to you and make those sentences good, clear sentences.

Maybe it's my personal preference, but give me a little touch of the why. Tell me a little bit about why as a reader and viewer. Whatever you can put in there to make that bridge between the audience and the art is going to be helpful.

I do have a few suggestions for structure. You talk about this also. There are so few rules about artist statements anywhere. There are dos and don'ts but not hard concrete formatting like for an essay or something.

I do suggest a couple of different structures just because structure is comforting to a reader. They don't want to be jostled around a curving path of logic. They want it to go beginning, middle and end so it makes some kind of sense.

To me, that's even more important than making sure you get the how, why and what in there. Make sure you lead your reader somewhere logical. Does that make sense?

Alyson: Absolutely. Something else that came to mind is that sometimes we get clues to what is best to include through those conversations that we have with people.

For instance, sometimes, quite frankly, how you make something is just not that interesting. Everyone knows how to do it and it's not that interesting.

There are other aspects of your work that are much more intriguing to people because it's so mysterious or they think, "Wow, I've never done that." You get clues by talking to people as to what they grab on to. I would say listen to those and put a little bit more of that juice in.

Vicki: I agree. It's those repetitious questions that you get from people that give you great clues about what to write about.

Alyson: Have you noticed that some artists that haven't written a lot are going back to that structure they learned in 9<sup>th</sup> grade? I don't even remember what it is, but I've noticed this in some people's things. There's an introductory sentence, first, second, third and then the conclusion. It says, "In conclusion." We are really going there? We don't do that anymore.

I want to go back to how important it is and reiterate this to get a lot of stuff out and to use those prompts.

You may do this in your book, Vicki. I didn't read it word for word, although it's really an easy read. What I encourage people to do is go back and circle the things that stand out. Start there with your statement.

Vicki: Yes. I like to include also little tricks that might work for different people, like fill-in-the-blank sentences, prompts or word coffee that you liked.

Alyson: Let's talk about Word Coffee. I loved that chapter. Tell us the premise of Word Coffee and how one would use this.

Vicki: I totally made up the name Word Coffee. I got the idea because, for a while, I worked as a copywriter and I wrote commercials for three radio stations and two television stations. It was a real education in a lot of ways of just cranking out sentences and definitely getting to the point.

I bluffed my way into the job. I had no training as a copywriter. I was just a writer who needed a job.

I ran out to the bookstore after I got hired and I picked up a copywriting book. It was page after page of words that are common in commercials. Now you know why everything sounds alike on the radio.

I'd keep it in my top drawer. When I would get an assignment and I drew a blank, it was a subject I didn't know anything about or I had no motivation to write this but the deadline was looming, I would open that book, flip through the pages and fill up my head with all of these words.

When I was figuring out how to get this idea across to artists, I thought, "I'm going to give them a few pages of just words." They're not necessarily art speak words. I tried to eliminate those. They're active verbs and energetic adjectives.

I use it to fill up my head and it can jostle some ideas for full, complete sentences.

I know you like that too. Why did you latch on to that?

Alyson: It was part of my book that I was going to write. I don't really edit artist statements anymore but I used to. I found that some people cling to one word and there's no variety in there. That's why I love this. It's like a thesaurus without the definitions and so forth.

There are two columns on six pages of words like contradict, energy, execute, experiment, literal and magnify. There are these words that we use to talk about art, art history, criticism and so forth. They say, "Oh, yeah. That's in my work. I need to do a sentence with that." I really like that.

Vicki: Thanks. There's a tool I use on mine too when I'm struggling for a word. It's [www.WordNik.com](http://www.WordNik.com). It's not your typical online thesaurus at all. It breaks down words into different categories. At the bottom there's a word map. It's a fun site if you love words. I go to it all the time when I'm writing. Check that out.

Alyson: I wrote that down and I'm going to spend a lot of time there. I can already tell. That made this whole conversation worthwhile for me.

There are useful phrases. These are phrases we usually hear from artists, but they're valid and ones that you would use, like "my observation of," "my vision of" or "reflects my way of." I love that. There are different ways of saying something.

Vicki: I think it's perfectly acceptable to use and copy these phrases I put in the book. Your artist statement doesn't have to be entirely original. That is a problem that artists lay on themselves that's not necessary. Put that pressure on your artwork but not your artist statement.

Just make your artist statement clear and truthful and I think you've made your mark, as long as you're connecting. The idea that it has to be original and brilliant like my art, don't put that on yourself. It's not needed.

Alyson: It definitely is not. In my opinion, that Word Coffee chapter is worth the price of the book alone, which is only \$9.95.

Vicki: Thank you.

Alyson: Don't listen to this, you guys, but if I were you, I would take that chapter out and sell that for \$9.95 as a PDF download. It is so wonderful.

Vicki: You're brilliant.

Alyson: We are running low on time. I had told people that we were going to talk about cover letters. That's when I thought I wanted to do the whole thing about cover letters, but I realized that's not really an hour-long talk.

We haven't discussed that in any of my stuff. Can we talk briefly about the structure of a cover letter?

Vicki: Yes. I, once again, broke it down in to the trusty structure of beginning, middle and end.

First of all, the main thing I wanted to get across to people is how often I have heard gallery owners frustrated with emails from artists. They don't observe the simplest thing like a full signature with all of your contact information.

They've read a million of these things. They are scanning your email for a key sentence. You don't have to compose a long and laborious letter to a person.

You're going maintain some sense of formality. This is not a casual email. It is a formal email, if there is such a thing. Even though it's an email, it should have some formality to it.

In the beginning, you state what you want. This is so important to people reading hundreds of emails. What do you want? Please don't spend two or three paragraphs introducing yourself and going on about your personal philosophy of life. Tell me what you want. That's what a businessperson needs.

Alyson: Sometimes I read emails and I don't know what they want. Why in the world are they emailing me? It's like they don't have anyone else to talk to. I think they want something, but I'm not sure what it is.

Vicki: How frustrating for everyone.

The beginning is to state what you want. The middle is what you can offer. If you are offering a gallery a chance to look at your work, you'd say, "I believe I'm a good candidate because \_\_\_\_\_. At this point in my career, I've completed \_\_\_\_\_. My experience has prepared me by \_\_\_\_\_."

If you're applying for some sort of funding, say, "I am suited for this role because of my \_\_\_\_\_." What can you offer? That's the middle.

The end is that you simply provide a list of anything you have attached, if it's images, a press release or whatever. You emphasize your interest once again in communicating with them. You say thank you and goodbye.

You say, "I have enclosed my resume and three PDF images. I am excited by the possibility of meeting you. Thank you for your time." Then sign off.

Alyson: Excellent. I'm going to add one thing to that. You probably say this somewhere. In the beginning, if I'm reading a letter, can you tell me why I should listen to you? Say, "I'm a friend of so-and-so's. I met you at this place." If you can tell me that we have a connection, I'm immediately more interested in what you have to say.

This is so funny. I have people who pitch guest blog posts to me all the time. They're like professional guest bloggers. They say, "I've been a follower of your blog for a long time. I love what you have to say. You might be interested in this post that we did on industrial strength cleaners."

Vicki: Why? Have you seen my bathtub?

Alyson: I don't think you know who I am at all. Delete. Sometimes they really do go to great lengths. "I really loved your post on this, but maybe your readers would like to hear about the white sandy beaches of Aruba." I don't know.

That connection is really powerful whenever you're introducing yourself or networking and you can show some knowledge of the gallery or person that you're sending this to.

It's like if someone emailed you and said, "I got your book at such-and-such a place. I loved the chapter on Word Coffee. It helped me do this." You're much more likely to read it than if they said, "Would you read over my statement and tell me what you think?"

Vicki: That is a very good way to begin. Good point.

Alyson: Get to the point. Tell people why.

The artist who did the paintings about eating her face is Dana Schutz. I do want to give her credit since I mentioned it so many times. I highly suggest seeing an exhibit of her work. It's fabulous. Listen to her. She's so entertaining.

Does anyone have a question for Vicki?

Ann: It's so nice to hear your calls. I so appreciate this program.

Alyson: We're so glad you're here. What's your question for Vicki?

Ann: When you were talking about a structure for artist statements, you mentioned that the old school was passé cliché. What structure would you recommend?

Vicki: I have three different structures that I go through in the book. I'll just make this really simple. I'm a strong believer in beginning, middle and end, but don't confuse that with the old-fashioned structure that you need to have this introductory sentence followed by two supporting sentences and ending with a concluding sentence. That is what Alyson was talking about.

What I'm talking about is using beginning, middle and end in any way you want to and in a more informal way, but you're carrying your reader through a path. You're telling a story. That's why a storytelling form of the artist statement can be really great.

Can I read you a quick one from my book? I want you to notice how it contains the how, what and why, and that it has a beginning, middle and end.

There was a big storm, and my neighbor's 75-year-old walnut tree was split in half by lightning. I offered to help him chop it and haul it if he would give me a big piece to carve. These sculptures are made from a section of the trunk that cured in my shop for five years before I figured out what I wanted to do with it.

I looked at that wood every day. It finally occurred to me to keep the side with the char left by the lightning strike and expand on the theme of burned wood in the supported frames. For me, this series is about both destruction and preservation. It's about what we choose to keep after going through trauma.

That has the how, what and why. You've told a story, and you've had a beginning, middle and end. That type of structure really draws people in. They love stories.

Alyson: I love that. I'm chiming in here because my litmus test for a good artist statement is that it should make people want to look at the work rather than just read the words. I totally want to see the sculpture with the lightning strike on it. That's really powerful.

Did that help, Ann?

Ann: Thank you. That was fabulous.

Alyson: Great. Does anyone else have a question for Vicki?

Holly: You were talking about how the little tidbits go a long way for the art. My question is that I'm one of those artists where everything I make has a really in-depth story behind it, but I've always been really hesitant to give it because they're very personal. At the same time, they're universal.

I've just recently started writing the stories because every time I tell the story, it sells the work. I've had a lot of people pushing me to tell the stories online. I've just started putting a paragraph with each of the sculptures as I get a chance to write them on the website.

I have that Dragon NaturallySpeaking program, so I put on my headphones, and while I'm working I pretend like I'm talking to somebody and try to explain what the piece is about. Then I can pick through and find the sentences that are the most important about it without being too specific.

There are some pieces that are specifically about a certain concept. For the most part, I try to leave them open ended because I feel everybody has a different ending.

Vicki: Is it about leaving your ending open?

Holly: It's that and having the story online. I'm getting ready to go to Santa Fe Indian Market. My stuff is very contemporary, but it has a draw that goes directly through Native American mythology.

Being a new person at the market and trying to make a connection so people understand, I've been told by many different artists, "Please write the stories down. Put it next to the work so that when people come through your booth, they can see and latch on to what that idea is."

Vicki: You said it yourself. You said stories always sell the work. That tells you something really powerful is happening. You are connecting the viewer to your work.

This is a perfect example of how language shapes perception. Back to my original thesis that I got from my professor, language does shape perception. If you think about it through the course of history, storytelling has been one of the most wonderful ways to shape our perception. I couldn't encourage you enough to continue to tell stories.

Alyson: Add them to your website.

Holly: I've just started. I even went to the effort to change my website to a different format where I could type it in and have it live. Like I said, I've really been on the fence because I've had people say, "No, it's visual, so you should be able to get it."

Alyson: There's a reason museums have labels and text. That is what connects people and brings people in. I also think it's perfectly okay for you to leave the ending open. However you want to wrap that up is totally okay, but if you want people to draw their own conclusions from the story you've provided, that's fine too.

Vicki: You could maybe come up with an ending sentence for all of your stories that has that kind of open-ended conclusion. "This is the story for me. I hope you will look and find your own story." I threw that off the top of my head, but do you know what I'm saying? You could use the same concluding sentence that does leave it open.

Holly: That's wonderful.

Alyson: I can't wait. Vicki, you don't know Holly's work, but I have a lot of questions about it, and I can't wait to read the stories as to where that stuff is coming from. It's very interesting. It's figurative, but it's abstract. It's symbolic. I see mythology in it, so I'm really excited to read the stories, Holly.

Holly: Thank you. There's whimsy and dark all at the same time. They're up there. I started. The writing is the hardest part. I definitely plan on purchasing your book.

Vicki: Thank you.

Alyson: For people listening, it's [www.HollyWilson.com](http://www.HollyWilson.com) so people can look at the stories.

You have just given us a good segue to wrap up. Thank you so much.

Holly: Thank you.

Alyson: Vicki, you had something you wanted to offer to people listening on the line.

Vicki: Yes. I wanted to offer my writing and editing services to you at a discount. If you just mention Alyson's name before July 1, it will be \$27 for my writing/editing services. I can get a lot done in an hour. I hope you'll visit my website at [www.ArtWriteBook.com](http://www.ArtWriteBook.com). Thank you so much.

Alyson: Thank you. Did you say people have until July 1?

Vicki: Yes. In the next couple of week, just let me hear from you, and mention Alyson. That would be great.

Alyson: For those of you listening later, that's July 1, 2013.

I can tell you that Vicki's services are going to go up in the future if she listens to me, so get in on this.

Vicki: I do, Alyson. I listen to you.

Alyson: Her normal fee is \$35 an hour, which is a bargain anywhere, so \$27 sounds like it would be a great investment if you had some writing you need help with.

Everyone listening, be sure to check out Vicki's book and her offerings at [www.ArtWriteBook.com](http://www.ArtWriteBook.com), and follow her on Twitter, @ArtWriteBook.

Thank you so much, Vicki. We really appreciate it.

Vicki: It's my pleasure. I'm so grateful that you gave me this opportunity. Thank you to all the artists who listened.

Alyson: I will tell you that I think everyone stayed on until the end, so you had our attention to the very end. We really appreciate it.

I appreciate everyone who is a member. Thank you so much for being here and for being present on this nice summer day.

This is Alyson Stanfield with [www.ArtBizCoach.com](http://www.ArtBizCoach.com).